

God Alone!

Reference texts:

Gen 32, 23-33

Jn 3, 14-17

Jn 15, 1-11

2 Cor 12, 7-10

Gal 2, 20

Phil 1, 21-24

From the writings of St. Luigi Orione

Dearest brother in Jesus Christ,

Praised be Jesus Christ!

After six months of struggle, Jesus has triumphed and conquers my heart.

As a dearest friend, I am here to share with you news that will fill your soul with consolation.

I am no longer of this world.

Today - May 21st - I have abandoned it to embrace the cross of Jesus Christ and follow Him wherever He may go.

Nevertheless, my body will remain at the world's disposal until Our Lord decides to take it elsewhere.

Join me in thanking His Divine Majesty, and pray with me that He may inflame me with charity and goodwill towards His desires.

Farewell, world, farewell, parish... farewell, country... farewell, relatives, farewell!

Farewell, past... farewell, my freedom... farewell, my will. Farewell, my possessions... farewell and goodbye!

World, flesh, devil, I reject and abandon you by the power of the Holy Spirit... I kick you away and renounce you to follow Jesus Christ... and forever I leave you in the name and glory of my Lord.

Farewell! Pray for me, a sinner.

Long live Jesus! Jesus triumphs!

*Yesterday I found myself in the room of a good priest,
and there my gaze fell upon these words: - God alone!*

At that moment, my gaze was filled with weariness and pain, and my mind was reflecting on many days full of toil like yesterday's, - and amidst the whirlwind of so many anxieties and the confused sound of so many sighs, it seemed to me that the affable and kind voice of my angel was whispering to me:

God alone, troubled soul, God alone!

On a window sill there was a plant of cyclamens, further ahead a corridor and some priests gathered devoutly in meditation, and even further ahead a crucifix, a dear and venerated crucifix that reminded me of beautiful and unforgettable years, and my tear-filled gaze ended up there at the feet of the Lord!

And it seemed to me that the soul was uplifted, and that a voice of peace and comfort descended from that pierced heart, inviting me to rise up, to confide my sorrows to God, and to pray!

What sweet silence, full of peace!... and in the silence I kept repeating within myself, God alone! And it seemed to me that I could feel a beneficial and calm atmosphere around my soul!...

And then I saw within myself the reason for the present pains:

I saw that instead of seeking to please God alone in my work,

for years and years I had been seeking the praise of men, and I was in a continuous search, in a continuous effort for someone who could see me, appreciate me, applaud me; and I concluded within myself: we must begin a new life even here, indeed we must begin from here: - work seeking God alone!

To work under the gaze of God, of God alone! Oh yes, in these words there is a whole new rule of life, there is everything that is enough for the Work of Divine Providence:

The gaze of God!

The gaze of God is like a dew that fortifies,

it is like a luminous ray that fertilizes and expands: - let us therefore work without clamor and without pause, let us work under the gaze of God, of God alone!

The human gaze is a scorching ray that even fades the most resistant colors: it would be for our case like the icy breath of the wind that bends, curves, spoils the still tender stem of this poor little plant.

Every action done to make noise and to be seen loses its freshness in the eyes of the Lord: it is like a flower passed through many hands and barely presentable.

O poor Work of Divine Providence, be the flower of the desert that grows, opens, blooms, because God has told it to, and that does not change, if the passing bird sees it, or if the blowing wind disperses its newly formed leaves.

For our soul and for our entire life: God alone! God alone!

Let's start immediately with a passage from Don Orione that we could title "Jesus has won."

...

I wanted to start with this passage, which for him, represents the first of the "key experiences" of Jesus' life. We do not know exactly if it was written in 1890 or 1891, so Luigi is 18 or 19 years old. Immediately after, he moved to work at the Duomo as a custodian (June 1891), and he immediately set about meeting boys for games and catechism, enrolled in the Saint Vincent De Paul association; at 20 he will open the official oratory and at 21 the first institute.

It speaks of the struggle between his desires, fears, etc., and the voice of God that agitates and urges him to give more, to give everything. He came from the experience in the seminary of Don Bosco, all activity and fervor, he left because he had understood that he had to do something

different, but in Tortona he found a lukewarm climate, a dimmed fervor: what was the point of being there? The struggle lasts six months. It is a struggle that is conducted not by fleeing from God, but by praying because even the other desires are not bad, he could become a good priest like his companions, take a parish where he could be a good shepherd, speak to people about God and many other good things, stay close to his mother (his father dies in January 92), but all this is not enough, he feels that God wants more, he wants everything. Isn't it too much? Isn't it presumptuous? Isn't it running away from a seminary that he doesn't like? No! It is choosing Christ and embracing him on the cross. He is aware that this choice is neither simple nor easily accepted by others, therefore he says: "my body will still be for the amusement of the world."

Our vocation comes from God and comes for service. If we are in a sincere relationship with God, not necessarily deep or mystical, but sincere, then God reveals himself to us.

Usually there is a moment, in each of our lives, when we have a clear sense of what we are and what we must do. It is God who gives us the indication of where to go. Usually, it is not an intellectual event, that is, understanding the logic of things, but an experience of Faith. This is the key experience that is accompanied by fervor, desire, happiness. It is important to treasure it and keep it ready because our human being returns then to the charge with its fears, desires for material things, search for tranquility and easy life.

So, if we are available, God purifies us.

Remember the episode of Genesis (Gen 32: 23-33) in which the struggle between Jacob and the Angel is mentioned. It is a strange episode in that context. The angel cannot win and since it is becoming morning, the time to return to work, to activity, he strikes Jacob on the thigh and makes him lame. At that point Jacob declares himself defeated and asks for the blessing. Now Jacob changes his identity, from now on he will be called Israel. Why does Jacob have to struggle with the angel before entering the promised land? Why doesn't he want to give up? The Fathers of the Church have always seen in this episode a metaphor of spiritual struggle. A physical impairment, a defeat, help us to remain more humble, more available, trusting more on Divine Providence.

God does not act with our parameters of efficiency, because otherwise we become proud. He uses our weakness to highlight his strength (cf. 2 Cor 12: 7-10). We are useful instruments to God only when we manage to keep all our tendencies under control and work only for God.

Luigi Orione probably had another revelation a year later, during Holy Week (1892?) and here he understood more concretely what he had to do. We are at the beginning of the first oratory that was already functioning but was officially inaugurated in July 1892. He will say that our Congregation was born on a Good Friday at the foot of the cross and will flourish only if we remain attached to the cross.

The cross can take on various faces: it can be physical suffering, or defeat, failure, or perhaps a misunderstanding by the Superiors, the lack of gratitude from those we benefit. Everything serves to purify us, to keep us good instruments in the hands of God.

John in the Gospel says that God loves us to the point of sending his Son, not to condemn us but to save us (Jn 3: 14-17). Now it is up to us to remain united in his love as the vine is united to the

branches. Only in this way can we be sure of bearing fruit as people, first of all, and then as apostles (Jn 15:1-11).

St. Paul has reached such unity with God in his being an apostle that he can exclaim: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2: 20). For him, it is no longer important to do one thing or another, to be in one place or another, the important thing is to be in communion with Christ. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil 1: 21-24).

If we think about the thirst for positions, careerism, the desire for fame or recognition that often poison our actions (even us religious and priests).

Here then is another page from Don Orione entitled "God alone."

...

He published this page in the magazine "Piccola Opera della Divina Provvidenza" in 1899. He has been a priest for 4 years, he already has a seminary, he already prints a magazine, he goes around preaching, he has students in Turin and 3 or 4 priests with whom he directs some agricultural colonies, a college in San Remo, he is about to open one in Noto, etc. (he was 27 years old).

As you heard here he says: "Then I saw inside me the reason for the present pains: I saw that instead of seeking in my work to please God alone, I had been begging for the praise of men for years and years, and it was a continuous search, in a continuous effort for someone who could see me, appreciate me, applaud me..."

Who among us does not fall into this trap? Yet in seeking happiness at all costs, we end up losing it.

We are men of God, only in God can we find our fulfillment and our peace, our success and our salvation.

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Hearing the talk about "God alone" the idea might arise that God wants us all to be hermits, enclosed monks. Without detracting from this great vocation to the contemplative life, the majority of us are instead called to live contemplation in action. The danger we face is creating a division between prayer and apostolate as if they were two separate moments of life, like a machine that refuels at night and in the morning and then runs, consuming fuel throughout the day. In this, we run two very great dangers: the first is that running will increasingly take precedence over time and energy, consuming them and leaving less and less space for refueling; the second, greater danger is that in apostolate, then, one will be a man who approaches others without remembering that both we and they are bearers of Christ. So, next will come the two great areas of the deacons' apostolate: the service of the word and the service of charity.

The Deacon is the Man of the Word

Reference texts:

Lk 2

Is 55: 8-11

1 Cor 9:16-18

1 Cor 1:17-18

From the writings of St. Luigi Orione

Our first Rule and life, my dear brothers and sons in Jesus Christ, shall be to observe, with great humility and sweet and ardent love for God, the Holy Gospel, following the counsels of perfection given to us by the Lord, by living in humble obedience, sincere poverty, and perfect chastity; by annihilating ourselves for the love of Christ and, in imitation of Him, renouncing everything to have only Jesus and His holy spirit as our sole good.

Our first rule, I repeat, shall therefore be the observance of the Holy Gospel. But to observe the Gospel, it is first necessary to know it: to know it well and then, with the help of God, to live it, the Holy Gospel, to live it in spirit and in form. Only thus shall we be true Christians, and then we shall be true religious, if we follow Jesus even in His Gospel counsels of perfection. We are Christians insofar as we imitate the life and live the doctrine of Christ, and we shall be true religious if we live the perfect life, wholly consecrated to the Lord and the Church, with holy vows, generously renouncing ourselves and the things of the world, abandoned into the hands of God and our Superiors.

And so that the Gospel may be better understood and observed, it is good that it be impressed upon our minds, and not just in pieces and fragments. Therefore, I recommend to you, my dear ones, the diligent reading and study of the Holy Gospel. This is why The Imitation of Christ tells us, from the first chapter: "our highest study should be to meditate on the life of Jesus". And it does not say to meditate on life, but in the life of Jesus, that is, to enter into the depths and live on Jesus, of the life of Jesus. We must, therefore, always have the Gospel before the eyes of our minds and carry it in our hearts, to live it.

The service of the Word is one of the things required of Deacons and perhaps one that you will exercise the most. Now, not only can you preach, but you do so as minister of God. You hold in your hands a very powerful weapon. When there is a debate or a dialogue on equal terms, you express your opinion and anyone can respond to you. However, when you preach, people listen, and most of the time, they are there because they trust you. It's a great responsibility. People have come because they want to hear the Word of God, that is, God speaking, and they want it from you, who are men of God.

We proclaim the Word of God, not our own. This requires a great deal of preparation first of all to know it, study it, be sure of what is said, and prepare it each time even if it concerns passages you

already know. Additionally, your preaching is usually integrated into a liturgical context, that is, of prayer. Therefore, people expect not a lesson, but a message of salvation to be prayed with faith. The key to success lies in the Holy Spirit who assists you, so the best preparation is done on the text, in prayer, rather than on other books.

The Word of God is effective in itself because it is God who speaks, and the Holy Spirit among His gifts also includes the ability to make those who listen understand. Isaiah says that the Word of God is like rain that benefits and produces fruit regardless (Isaiah 55:8-11).

Saint Paul made preaching, his way of life, and from his experience, he can clearly state that the effectiveness of preaching does not depend on the knowledge of the speaker but on his attachment to Christ (1 Corinthians 1:17-18; 9:16-18). His work was not taken up for his own satisfaction or personal initiative but was a mission entrusted to him by God himself.

As for charity, the motto applies: We can only give what we have. People will perceive as a message of love and salvation what you say if, while communicating it, you yourselves first feel it as a message of love and salvation.

All the saints have been great preachers. They, not only prepared themselves through study, but above all through prayer and sacrifice. For this, meditation is very important, along with study, and practice of the Gospel. Meditation was not just the moment of preparing sermons but the main tool to verify our union with Christ to see how faithful we are to our consecration.

I also bring you the example of a great servant of the Word of God: the Virgin Mary. After Jesus' Ascension, we see her in the Upper Room among the apostles to encourage them, confirm them, and make known to them that part of the life of Jesus that they didn't yet know: not only the thirty years of hidden life in Nazareth but also the work of Jesus seen from a feminine and maternal perspective.

But how did she prepare for these moments or for this task that Jesus himself gave her while he was on the cross? We find an answer in chapter 2 of Luke. I mention three episodes:

- Luke 2:19 "Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart." We are in Bethlehem when the shepherds come to see the child and tell of the angels. Mary could have confirmed their stories by recounting her encounter with the angel. Instead, she remains silent, prays, and treasures. Until a few moments ago, Jesus himself was in her womb; now the womb is empty but she begins to fill herself with his life, his word. The tabernacle does not remain empty but is filled for the moment when she will be called to deliver this treasure too, namely among the disciples after Jesus' ascension.

- Luke 2:33 "And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him." Here we are in the temple. They have heard the words of Simeon and Anna. They are not two temple officials but two devotees. Even to them, Mary could have given a confirming word, but she only marvels. The discovery of Christ and the unfolding of his mystery are always new; every day requires us to approach with "amazement." Wonder is not always the result of marveling at something beautiful (as the shepherds did after the announcement of the angels), but it can be the result of facing something difficult to accept, painful, demanding, of which we do not understand the meaning.

Let us remember, among other things, that Simeon prophesies to Mary the sword that will pierce her soul.

- Luke 2:48-52 "And when they saw him, they were astonished. ... they did not understand the saying ... But his mother treasured up all these things in her heart." Here we are still in the temple, but 12 years later. The subject before them is Jesus himself, and once again, what happened is something strange, different. Mary expresses her and Joseph's concern. Faced with Jesus' disconcerting answer reminding them that they are mere instruments, facilitators, Mary again assumes an attitude of amazement, listening, reflection: she treasures.

VC 38 tells us: "The call to holiness can only be accepted and cultivated in silence and adoration." Considering that Mary, in the Gospels is relatively little talked about, the fact that this attitude is reiterated three times means that it is important. These passages are then parallel to Luke 8:20. "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." In Luke 11:27-28 we have: "As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!' But he said, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!'" Now you understand that at that moment Jesus did not at all reject the Mother's request to see him.

So, at the birth of Jesus, many events could have made Mary a star. She lives them with wonder and reflection; her heart is dedicated to reflecting on events. Mary's attitude is silence and listening. She listens to the words spoken about Him, marvels at them because she is facing something much greater than herself; she loves them, feels directly involved, feels "one" with those who utter them, and finally testifies to them first with her life. As long as Jesus is present, she is close to him with support, respect; when Jesus leaves, even with words.

Jesus himself is the master of silence. He, who spent the years of his ministry preaching, prepared himself in the silence of the house of Nazareth for thirty years. Before starting his apostolic life, he withdrew to the desert for forty days; before choosing the twelve apostles, he spent the night in prayer; before teaching to pray, he was found in a secluded place to pray; before beginning the discourse on the bread of life, the most important and the hardest among those in the Gospel of John, and at the end of which it is written that many went away, he spent the night praying; and before the Passion, he withdrew to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray.

Inner silence is the characteristic of every Christian who wants to better understand Christ. We are called to bring Christ to others: what Christ do we bring if we do not know him? We are called to dispense the love of God, but what love do we dispense if we have not experienced and assimilated it ourselves?

So, the importance of daily meditation, which is not a direct preparation for the homily, lies in the desire to delve deeper into the mystery of God, to feel one with Him. When I speak, I must be aware that God is using me to deliver a message to those who listen. Most of the time, we do not know what the true need of the listener is, but God knows. We must be aware that the Holy Spirit guides us in that moment. We must be aware that the people in front of us are important to God, they are the true purpose for which we are there. We are only instruments, and any aspect of pride,

arrogance, superiority, excessive knowledge ruins our preaching, preventing its effectiveness.

We never tire of listening to the one we love; we never tire of thinking about Him and talking to Him. The service of the word must therefore include four moments:

- Careful listening to be sure to understand what He says;
- Wonder to recognize that the message we bring goes beyond ourselves;
- Love for that message, we feel it as ours, we feel it as important;
- Testimony, which is the necessary fruit of the previous point and is made of word and life.

Let us try a small exercise.

Try to imagine that you can fly above a city.

What do you see? Buildings, churches? What do you hear? Cars? Is that all? Don't you see those people entering and leaving the buildings? Don't you hear what they are saying? Are they too small? Too far away? Because you look with your eyes and listen with your ears. It's not enough anymore. We must contemplate, that is, look with the eyes of God. In front of you, there are two million people hidden by the buildings, but each of them, before God, is more precious than all the buildings themselves.

Do you see that mom accompanying her child to play in the park; inside, she is worried about this child because she doesn't know if he will get hurt or win, if he will grow up well or not. Do you see that mason working there under the scorching sun, even though today is Saturday; he would have preferred to stay in the shade of his home with his wife and children, but he cannot because otherwise, at the end of the month, he will not have enough money to pay the bills, rent, food. Do you see that child in front of the toy store and he wants them all but knows that mom and dad cannot afford them. Look at that homeless person who has chosen to live on the sidewalk begging for alms; maybe he does it because he wants to be free, maybe because he has not found anything better, maybe because he has not had anyone to love him. Look at that prostitute there on the corner who would like to stop doing that job but cannot, who would like to have a normal life, a normal family, but cannot afford it. See that young person on the hospital bed: He would like to be with his friends having fun on his motorcycle or with his girlfriend strolling on the streets of the city or at the movies, and instead cannot because he is sick, and maybe he will never be able to do these things again.

God loves all these people.

We are now looking at them from above but then we will have to go back down there among them, with each of them, God for them.

What do you feel from up here? It's immense, too big. When you're down there, you only see a small part of it, and it's better. We feel inadequate, we are just a small drop in the ocean, but the ocean is made of drops and each one is important. A drop of poison is enough to kill hundreds of fish, a drop of medicine to heal them.

We must pray for them, bring them God because God wants to save them.

When you meet a person, look at them closely, listen to them, but then close your eyes and contemplate them, look back at the whole city and then turn your gaze to the crucifix, see what Christ sees and what your eyes do not see, feel what Christ feels and your ears do not hear.

The deacon is a Man of Service

Reference texts:

Mt 25:31-46

Jn 13:12-17

1 Cor 9:19

From the writings of St. Luigi Orione

Perfect joy can only be found in the perfect dedication of oneself to God and to humanity, to all humanity, to the most wretched as well as to the most physically and morally deformed, to the furthest away, to the most guilty, to the most adverse.

Place me, O Lord, on the mouth of Hell so that, by your mercy, I may close it. May my secret martyrdom for the salvation of souls, of all souls, be my paradise and my supreme bliss.

Love of souls - Souls! Souls! I will write my life with tears and with blood.

The injustice of men shall not weaken our full trust in the goodness of God. I am nourished and led by the breath of immortal and renewing hopes.

Our charity is a sweet and mad love of God and of men that is not of the earth. The charity of Christ is of such sweetness and ineffability that the heart cannot think, nor speak, nor the eye see, nor the ear hear.

Words always aflame: to suffer in silence, to pray, to love, to be crucified, and to adore.

Light and peace of heart, I will ascend my Calvary like a gentle lamb.

Apostolate and martyrdom: martyrdom and apostolate.

Our souls and our words must be white, chaste, almost childlike, and must all carry a breath of faith, of goodness, of comfort that lifts towards heaven.

Let us keep our eye and heart firmly in divine goodness.

Build Christ, always build! "Petra autem est Christus"

I do not know if you have experienced that while you are trying to concentrate on prayer, a group of children come and start playing noisily. Do they disturb you? Yes? They were not sent by mistake; they were sent by Divine Providence because while you were concentrating to hear the voice of God, He was telling you: "Listen, do you hear? I am out there playing. Now I'm crying with Matthew who fell, and I'm laughing with John who won. I'm angry with Mary because they won't let her play, and I'm happy with Josephine who just scored a point."

The Deacon is a man of service. The sense of this title is found first of all in the book of Acts of the Apostles where the creation of deacons is discussed. Here it is clear that they were instituted to take care of the poor on behalf of the disciples. But to understand how this service is given, we

must look at chapter 13 of the Gospel of John. At the moment of the washing of the feet, Jesus says to the Apostles: "Do you understand what I have done? ... if I, your teacher, have done this, you also should do as I have done." "Whoever wants to be a master must be a servant to all." He practiced it all through his life. I will dwell for a moment on John 13. You know that it is the dividing point between the two parts of the Gospel of John. The chapter begins solemnly. It says that the hour has come for him to be glorified, that hour that he had announced at Cana where he had presented the change of the Covenant between God and man by turning the water of purification into the wine of the banquet. Now this Covenant is fully revealed and begins with the washing of the feet; it will culminate on Calvary. The apostles still have before their eyes what happened three days earlier when, entering Jerusalem, Jesus was acclaimed as the Son of David. They still delude themselves that Jesus is there to become king, to assume power, and consequently, they too will have power. Jesus wants to break this illusion once and for all: here, there will be no talk of human power, but of the power of love, and when love is involved, one cannot rise, but one must lower oneself, or if one wants to rise, one must climb the Cross ("*when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself*"). So, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end, and He, the Master, becomes a servant and washes their feet.

The issue of service is neither a simple nor obvious discourse; but lowering oneself is even less so.

According to the gospel, there are two aspects of service:

- 1) The object of the service is not the person in himself but God Himself, or rather, the person because God dwells in him. Remember the parable of Mt 25 "Whatsoever you did to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me." Apostolate is not about cheap philanthropy nor satisfying a personal need or finding satisfaction.
- 2) Love is much more than social justice as preached by some. In the name of social justice, one can even come to eliminate those who create injustice. True love will never do this. Furthermore, justice, in itself, does not seek the recovery of the guilty, while Jesus came also (and especially) for sinners, for the lost sheep that is not lost by mistake, but that has run away; for the prodigal son who leaves and squanders all his possessions with prostitutes; etc.

Let's read a passage from Don Orione. ...

Don Orione's anxiety does not stem from his good heart or his desire to change society, but from Jesus' words on the cross: I thirst; thirst to save all, thirst for all to experience this love that He is giving totally along with His blood, His life; thirst to be able to say, "It is finished." Don Orione, who, like St. Paul, is all for Christ, sees around the cross all the souls longing for salvation, even those who outwardly reject it, and feels the same thirst as Christ, thirst for true peace where the whole multitude of people is Christ's inheritance. He cannot allow even one to be lost, but with a gesture of true love, he once again gives himself entirely to God with the desire, if God wills it, to stand even at the gates of hell, to lose his own beatitude in order to save others.

Here we have some important points regarding our apostolate.

1) The true novelty of the New Testament lies not in a set of new ideas but in the figure of Jesus himself. God, in Jesus Christ, pursues the lost sheep. We do not decide whom to save, how to save, etc., it is all the work of Christ, we must worry about being united to Him, feeling as He feels, seeing Him in others. The first question in pastoral care, therefore, is not what to do, but how to obtain the Holy Spirit. There can be no true apostolate if what we talked about the first day does not exist: being united with God.

2) The second point is that charity is not only towards the physically needy but also the morally ones, those who do not want our help.

3) The third point is that there is no place for private interests, seeking consolations, etc. If they come, we thank God, but if there is rejection, slander, or opposition, let us remember the last of the beatitudes.

4) Apostolate is a means, not an end. A means to ensure that all experience love, God's care, so the most important part is not what is given but how it is given. A candy given with a smile, with love, is worth more than a meal given with indifference, paternalism.

The Deacon is a man of the Church

Reference texts:

Jn 17

1 Cor 12:4-13

From the writings of St. Luigi Orione.

to Monsignor Bandi,

I would like to renew to you all the moments, all the offering of my will and of my entire life in your hands for my health and for the glory of my dearest Lord, and if there is anything I can add to what I have already said in other letters, I tell you, dear father, that I intend to see in you the Lord, as I see Him, and I want, with the grace of Jesus, to do for you everything I would do for Jesus, not only to obey you, but to be yours even in what you may simply desire, precisely as I would do for what I see Jesus desiring.

And this being all yours in your hands in everything, from the will to the rags I wear, or that the Sons of Divine Providence wear; I want it to be, and I feel it to be so by the grace of God, a full sacrifice of self for love for Jesus and souls and the dear Pope, and for love for you, my father in the Lord, because you are more than a father, a living representative of Jesus for my soul.

And now that I have said this, and I say it with all the heart of a priest and of your son in the Lord with the firm will to give myself entirely to Jesus, willing to make any sacrifice, just to be all His, and to consume myself entirely and as soon as possible for Him: - I beg you, my dear father, to receive my will that I place in your hands as in the hands of my dearest Lord and love Jesus. Feel free to humble me and ask me to do everything you want, and to throw me where you believe, like mud in your hands, as long as you obtain from Jesus that I may love Him, and that I may burn and consume myself with love, and that I may suffer for love and melt with love, and more and more, since dying of love is too little, my dear father.

Sometimes I wonder why Christ wanted to create a structure that, because of the people who compose it, is always at risk of failing. Since the beginning, we know about the tensions and differences within the group of the twelve, and this is not only due to the presence of the traitor. At the crucial moment, they all flee except John, the youngest. Peter, who was like the leader, denies Jesus for fear of being recognized. Yet Christ trusts them. Throughout the centuries, despite the weaknesses of many of its members, the structure has held and has still been a source of salvation. Peter's boat has weathered the storms of heresies and schisms but has not sunk.

Our feeling part of the universal Church is not for an organizational purpose but must be pushed by true sense of belonging. Based on what we said in the last few days, we could say that the

purpose of our life is to be one with God. The practical way to show it through the testimony of the Word and of Charity, and our way of doing this is as children of the Church.

Two purposes or reasons in being attached to the Church:

- 1) It is necessary for us and our stability in our vocation.
- 2) It is necessary for the Church and the disoriented people of God.

1) You are all aware of this need from all the courses of Theology you have taken, so I will not enumerate the theological aspects. Nowadays, there is a flattening of values. Superficiality and secularism are overshadowing spiritual values. Even in Africa and Asia, where these values are still strong, secularism is advancing fast.

Man has lost the ability to organize the emotional world, that is, to make sense of emotions and use them as points of positive strength, and since the aspect of Christian formation has been strongly challenged by two hundred years of atheistic history and philosophy, even the intellect is disoriented. Two worrying aspects are prevailing:

- a) Subjectivity prevails over objectivity.
- b) The need to have everything immediately (efficiency).

Let's give an example: faced with a moral case, pastoral guidance that orients towards God makes us say: moral law, nature, the Bible say that ... Now, applying them to the concrete situation, how should we act? Instead, today's world says: The moral law, etc., says that ... but given the concrete situation, those rules do not apply to the case, we should, instead follow what seems more appropriate; often there is a reference to pietism, emotionality, etc. Think of all the ongoing discussions about issues of life, euthanasia, abortion, in vitro fertilization, the issue of homosexuality, "gender," etc. Pope Francis, who is also very attentive to the needs of men and open to dialogue, called this attitude "False compassion and false mercy."

Furthermore, the practice of sacrifice, of mutual support, has disappeared. Society exerts so much pressure, changes so quickly that if something does not have an immediate effect, it is no longer valid. Then words like patience, sacrifice, solidarity, compassion, volunteering lose their value.

There are now thousands of prophets of well-being, of feeling good, happy, free, successful. Each of these has its own recipes and philosophies. For people now, the Church is one of many social agencies, often the least appealing, the least efficient. People take what they like and need from her; what could be useful is changed and manipulated, what is disliked is thrown away without regard.

The doctrine of Vatican II teaches us that in the Church, we find the sure path of true doctrine, the certainty of that truth that often eludes me.

That's why we need to stand by the Church even when we don't understand.

2) On the other hand, the Church needs us, and also people need us, because if the media raise and lower, with extreme ease, characters that today are presented as idols and tomorrow as corrupt, ordinary people need clear ideas, clear examples to follow, people like them, who are with them, but who follow a clear path.

Being men of the Church means, as we said two days ago, being men of God, with clear and practical doctrine, men who speak of God in a clear and simple way, men who sincerely experience the love of God (as said yesterday), and men of clear and provocative conduct. The document "Vita Consacrata" clearly states it, and Pope Francis repeats it in other words, that the perpetual vows you recently made, must be visible. They preach by themselves. Vows are not given to you by God for personal use but are gifts given for the universal Church.

When a priest lives in luxury, it is not him who is condemned by those who see him, but the Church that "is rich and lives a vow of poverty that is false." When a priest is morbidly attached to people or sometimes is even flirting, people criticizes the Church that ask her children to professes a vow of chastity that no longer makes sense to exist and perhaps has never existed, etc. Do you understand now Pope Francis' speeches? The Somascan Fathers, at the end of the last century, when the pedophilia scandals were shaking the Church in the United States and Ireland, thought, as a preventive measure, to close their orphanages in North America to avoid being accused unfairly or for trivial reasons with unpredictable damage to their image or even economic consequences. The Cardinal of Boston, instead, invited them to keep their institutions open because, he said, withdrawing would mean surrendering and losing that people forever. Instead, people need to see healthy testimonies that make them understand that not everything is rotten in the Church but that pure love exists.

The vocational crisis affecting the Church is not a crisis of numbers or quantity, but of values and quality.

- Being a man of the Church also means being a man of communion and community. The Church is a structure not created by chance, because love must pass through sharing, collaboration.

In this regard, we must pay attention to the temptation that in the Congregation we call "free minded" and that psychology calls the "Savior syndrome." There are religious, who live apostolate and even vows more radically than others, and so far there is nothing wrong, but they have a flaw. In the name of their radicalism, they do not know how to collaborate with others, they do not accept the structures of the community, they always criticize the inefficiency of superiors from the perspective of the effectiveness of their actions, and indeed they know how to attract the masses, they really start charitable works that reach many people. Often, however, it is seen that because of these ideas, they leave the Congregation and after some time they deflate and disappear. What is the mistake? It's the error of fundamentalism, that happens when one overvalues his strengths and ideas, and these become more important or even an obstacle to communion, to relationship. The charity they put at the center is not true love because love is a relationship, therefore, a capacity for communion, that is, to descend to the level of the other to save him. In the Savior syndrome, what happens, instead, is that what is lowered is not the true self but the externality; the psychological self is raised as a savior, and the "neighbor" becomes an object of feeling good, etc. When physical strength, or the satisfaction that comes from the smile of the beneficiaries diminishes, the person deflates and disappears, because he is not ready to give his life for the other. In apostolate, it is easier to work alone, and often is more effective. Working in community, one

often has to slow down his rhythms to wait for the other, cut some of his ideas because they are not shared, waste precious time to discern things that are already clear in my mind. But until the choices are made in community, there is no guarantee of truth, because there is no one questioning my ideas and therefore they will not be evaluated and will not grow.

When one has a strong, active, creative personality he either becomes a saint, like your founder, Mother Teresa, and many others who have accepted the challenge of communion and sharing, and created continuity, or they become dictators destined to fossilize and deflate because their collaborators are slaves not brothers, executors and not co-founders. They will not be able to guarantee the continuity of the future.

- Being a man of the Church means being a man of unity. It is what Jesus asked the Father as a gift for his disciples during the Last Supper (Jn 17). Being in unity does not mean denying or abolishing differences, this is called uniformity and is not a value. It does not mean, as society would like, that we all eat the same things and use the same machines, this is called globalization and is not a value. Unity means recognizing the differences in the other, accepting them as wealth even for me. We are different so that we can help and complement each other (1 Cor 12, 4-13). To do this, we must have the courage to look into each other's eyes with love, but not stop there, this is only the beginning of the journey, but then start walking together looking in the same direction, God who gives meaning to the existence of both.